



*Mennonite Brethren
Historical Society
Newsletter*

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CAPTURING MB HISTORY ON FILM

June 23 and 24 of this year have been slated as the dates for the filming of a three-part series on the history of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Featured in the films will be Dr. J.B. Toews, a well-known teacher, preacher, administrator and historian, presently residing in Fresno, California.

The filming will take place in the Central M.B. Church in Winnipeg. The public is invited, in fact encouraged to be part of this film. Dr. Toews will be addressing the audience and viewers will become a significant part of the film.

The official title of the film is THE MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH: A MISSIONARY MOVEMENT. The focus of the film will be the expansion of the Church in Russia, North America and throughout the world because of the its long-standing commitment to the missionary mandate.

Dr. Toews is no stranger to Canada or MB's in general. He was principal of the Bethany Bible School, president of MBBC, executive-secretary of the Mission Board and the president of the MB seminary in Fresno, California. For the past years he has served as executive-secretary of the Historical Commission of the MB Churches of North America. His years of service to the Mennonite Brethren Church qualify him to tell the story of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Once completed, the films will be made available to congregations and schools for use in classes or for general meetings. Filming the series will be DAYSTAR, a Mennonite non-profit film and distribution agency located in Henderson, Nebraska.

A film of this nature is costly, but at the same time very important. Since the Mennonite Brethren Church is constantly receiving new members into its congregations, it is often the case that many of these new members see the church in isolation from its past. While the history of the MB Church is not to be emulated, it is important for future growth that the moments of crisis, the surges of renewal and the times of missionary expansion are seen as encouragement and inspiration for its future witness of the Gospel. Recounting history is not a glorification of ourselves, but rather a testimony of the fact that God has been at work among us.

The cost of these films will be \$ 60,000. This will be split between the US constituency and the Canadian constituency. All monies are being received by donation. If you would like to help please send your donation to the Centre and make your cheques payable to the "Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches." All monies will be tax receipted.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of Canada will be held in conjunction with the Convention of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in Regina, the first weekend in July.

Definite plans for the meeting have not as yet been determined. However, the annual membership meeting will be held and members of the Society attending the Convention should watch for posted details.

MENNONITE EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA

The long-promised first volume of the "Mennonite Experience in America" (MEA) books, LAND, PIETY, PEOPLEHOOD by Richard K. MacMaster of Bridgewater, Virginia, has been published.

The MEA project is a major Mennonite writing effort by the U.S. Mennonites. Mennonites have lived in the United States for three centuries. MacMaster begins the story in Europe. As indicated in his subtitle, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MENNONITE COMMUNITIES IN AMERICA, 1683-1790, he carries it through to the American revolution.

Richard MacMaster, executive director of the Shenandoah Valley Historical Institute at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va., is well-known in the field of colonial and revolutionary Mennonite studies.

LAND, PIETY, PEOPLEHOOD recounts the Mennonite story in its larger American setting as well as from inside Mennonite and Amish communities. As a scholar fully trained in American history, MacMaster has probed the question of how the Mennonite story is a part of a larger American one.

America, he writes, found a place for these "hardworking and successful farmers, craftsmen, and small-scale businessmen, and their families." "In the nation's pluralism and denominationalism there was a niche for the Mennonites (and Amish)."

In America Mennonites no longer needed to flee from land to land as they had in Europe. Suffering had been evidence of earnest faith, but in America they established stable and moderately prosperous communities. One theme MacMaster treats is how their religious outlook changed as they no longer suffered.

Another theme emerged from the author's analysis of devotional literature, hymns, folk art, and community life. Mennonites and Amish shared these expressions with their neighbors and absorbed a Pietism which more or less changed their earlier Anabaptist and Mennonite outlook. By 1790 there was also the question of how to respond to American revivalism.

Through careful study of county records MacMaster reconstructed patterns of land ownership, wealth, and occupation. LAND, PIETY, PEOPLEHOOD moves far beyond religious history in the narrow sense. It examines Mennonites' economics, the nature of their communities, and their migrations and resettlement

in places such as Virginia's Shenandoah Valley.

And politics. During colonial days Mennonites and Amish were involved in Quaker efforts to guide the government of Pennsylvania. Then during the revolution they often clashed with American patriots.

The main goal of the Mennonite Experience in America series is to provide well-written books which weave together Mennonites' inner religious history and the outer history of economics, nation, and local community.

The series will bring together the histories of all Mennonite and Amish groups in the U.S. Like MacMaster's book, the other three volumes will deal both with the faith-history and with the larger, national setting. They will explore what Mennonite and Amish experience tells of the nation and its development.

LAND, PIETY, PEOPLEHOOD was made available in April, 1985 for \$16.20 in Canada through bookstores or from Herald Press, Scottdale, Pa., 15683.

Volumes to follow will be written by Theron F. Schlabach of Goshen College who is presently writing the second volume (1790-1890). James Juhnke of Bethel College in Kansas who is composing the third volume (1890-1930). The fourth (1930-1970), by Paul Toews of Fresno Pacific College, is in the research stage.

by Theron F. Schlabach
MEA Editor
Goshen, Indiana

RUNDSCHAU INDEXING CONTINUES

The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies has once again received a grant from the Federal Government of Canada to continue indexing the MENNONITISCHE RUNDSCHAU. The program supplying the grant is CHALLENGE '85. It is a summer employment program designed to provide future job training for students.

This summer the index for the years 1920 - 1939 will be completed. While it is too early to determine whether the index for these years will be typed and ready for distribution by the end of the summer, certainly the index will be at the stage where only the typing will remain to be completed. Utilization of computer word processing has already assisted in speeding the indexing along.

Employed this summer are the same two individuals who were employed last year. They are Herb Reapel, a graduate student in law from the University of Manitoba (incidentally this is Herb's fourth summer of working in the Archives), and Anita Enns, a music student from MBBC, who calls Asuncion, Paraguay her home.

Once completed, copies of the index for this period of time will be made available to the general public.

ANNA THIESSEN TRANSLATED

For years one of the major sources of information about the growth and development of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg has been the book written by Anna Thiessen, in 1955, entitled DIE STADTMISSION IN WINNIPEG.

Unfortunately, for the present generation, this book is simply not accessible to students and interested readers because it is written in the German language. To remedy this situation the Centre for MB Studies in Winnipeg has translated this book. Photocopies of the translation are available upon request.

Translating the book was Ida Toews, a teacher of German in the Winnipeg Public Schools for many years. Since retirement she has volunteered her expertise to the Centre one day each week and one of her major projects has been the completion of this translation.

A large part of the success of the Winnipeg Mission rested upon the Mary-Martha Home, the city home for country girls working in Winnipeg. Anna Thiessen was the Director of this home and she became the vibrant personality who stimulated the girls to aid in the mission activities within Winnipeg's noted "North End."

The translation of this book is well-done and very readable. Entitled THE CITY MISSION IN WINNIPEG, copies are available from the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies for \$16.00 each. To order please write and send a cheque to:

CENTRE FOR MB STUDIES
1-169 Riverton Ave.
WINNIPEG,, Manitoba
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NEW BOOK ON MB MISSIONS

Just released is a new book on Mennonite Brethren Missions. Written by Dr. G. W. Peters and published by Kindred Press the book covers the history of Mennonite Brethren Missions involvement.

Written as a study book, for use in our church schools, it also has good possibilities for use in Sunday School classes or other congregational related purposes.

Not only does the book cover the history of MB Missions, it also contains documents, statistics and study papers related to policies and strategies of MB Missions. While I have not as yet read the book, having just received a copy, it appears to be a very timely publication aiding the interested Mennonite Brethren to become more familiar with what our missions agency has done and is planning to do in the future.

ARNOLD DYCK VOLUME TO BE RELEASED

The first volume of the planned four-volume series containing the works of Arnold Dyck is slated for release this summer. Volume one will be comprised of VERLOREN IN DER STEPPE (novel in five parts) and AUS MEINEM LEBEN (autobiographical sketch).

Arnold Dyck has long been acknowledged as the outstanding Canadian Mennonite author writing German. His autobiographical novel, VERLOREN IN DER STEPPE, and his Low German sketches and plays, especially the adventures of Koop and Bua, have become Mennonite classics. These works, written in the hard times of the 1930's and during wartime, were published in modest form and limited editions and are mostly out of print. The new edition will include all previously published works of Arnold Dyck, but will also add a number of writings previously unpublished along with illustrations, letters and other new material. The Low German texts will appear in the new orthography recently agreed upon, which is close to what Dyck himself proposed.

Copies may be ordered from the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, c/o Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3P 0M4. The first volume will cost \$25.00.

TO GIVE LIFE TO THE OBITUARY

Every year at the board meetings of the Mennonite Publishing Service (which publishes the Mennonite Reporter) the question is raised by someone; should we not print obituaries?

Why don't we? Many Mennonite publications do; the Mennonite Reporter does not. The MB Herald does, but restricts the length and the number of pages to be given to obituaries in any given issue.

My research during the last four years on M.B. Home Missions and church planting has again proven how valuable obituaries are for providing certain kinds of detailed information sometimes entirely missing from otherwise good reports of another kind. I think that obituaries ought to be written by family members not only for sentimental or religious, but also for historical reasons. They should dwell on familial, educational and occupational details equally with those conversion stories of interest to the denomination.

I would like to suggest (if this idea is not already being acted upon) that archival depositories like the Centre for M.B. Studies and Heritage Centre at CMBC welcome, even more, encourage the deposit of family obituaries in such centres, that these be kept in an appropriate filing system, and be made available as copies (for the cost of photocopy, postage and handling) to those who require them for research. Perhaps this is presently beyond the workforce or budget or space limitations of either of these centres, but I throw this out for discussion and due consideration.

Though even in such a system archivists would want to limit the length of obituaries to say, five or six hundred words, they would at least give us all the assurance that some record of many unheard persons as well as others can come alive in the archives!

by Dr. Peter Penner
Sackville, New Brunswick

RESPONSE TO PETER PENNER

The idea which Dr. Peter Penner has suggested is a good one. While I wish that I could claim credit for what we do with obituaries at the Centre for MB Studies in Winnipeg, I must in all fairness state that my predecessor, Mr. Herbert Giesbrecht, began a system of filing obituaries many years before I became the Conference Archivist. We have kept this system and still add to it weekly.

Our approach is to clip the obituaries from the MB periodicals and file these alphabetically. We specifically obtain obituaries from the MB Herald, Christian Leader and the Mennonitische Rundschau. Unfortunately only the Mennonitische Rundschau prints obituaries of any length whatsoever. The obituaries in the Herald and the Leader are short, terse and sometimes lacking in the kind of detail which Dr. Penner suggests. However, the Herald has begun to make up for this by giving the archives the original, full-length obituaries which they receive from the family and from which they publish the shortened version.

The Centre would, of course, be happy to receive any obituaries that people would send to them and they would be included in this obituary file. I am not sure how one could implement this on a longer term basis so that church members would automatically think of the archives when they prepare obituaries. It seems to me that the best approach is still via the institutional papers. Any ideas readers would want to give to this question would be most welcome. But it should be clear to our readers that we see the importance of obituaries, as Dr. Penner suggests, and have set up a process for making them accessible to the general public.

by Ken Reddig
Conference Archivist

NEUFELD DIARIES BEING INDEXED

The large collection of diaries deposited in the Centre for MB Studies this past fall, by the Dr. Abram H. Neufeld family, are presently being indexed. The diaries were written by Rev. Hermann A. Neufeld, a well-known Mennonite Brethren Reiseprediger in Russia and Canada.

The diaries, some 23 volumes in total, cover the years of 1880-1931. Since Rev. Neufeld traveled extensively, and wrote about his travels, the diaries are an important source of new information about the early growth and development of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia.

Since the diaries comprise some 7,000 pages, access to them becomes problematic, particularly if general information is being sought. Therefore, a good index to their contents is crucial.

Indexing the diaries is Ida Toews, who was a public school teacher of German for many years. Her ability to read the handwritten gothic script made her the natural choice for this particular task.

To the present she has indexed the first four volumes. Copies of the index are available from the Centre for the nominal cost of ten cents per page.

Anyone interested in receiving a copy of the index should write to the Centre, and photocopies will be mailed upon receipt.

The Newsletter of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of Canada is published four times a year by the Executive of the Society, at the Centre for MB Studies in Canada. All correspondence regarding the Society or the Newsletter should be addressed to:

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WINNIPEG, Manitoba
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If you know of someone who would be interested in becoming a member of the Society and receiving the Newsletter please have them fill out the following form, together with the yearly membership fee of \$5.00, and send it to the NEWSLETTER EDITOR, at the above address. Editor of the Newsletter is Ken Reddig.

Name: _____
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